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Administration of the Bahmani Kingdom

The empire, which Ghiyasuddin Tughlak bequeathed to his son Muhammad Tughlak, ranked in point of extent, population and wealth as the greatest empire not only in the whole of Asia but probably in the whole world. The whole country from the Himalayas on the north to Dvarasamudra on the south, and from the eastern confines of Bengal on the east to Sind and Gujrat on the west, obeyed one sceptre. But this vastness and unwieldy extent of the Delhi empire at a time when there was no telegraphy or steamship, without adding strength and power to the central government, only multiplied its dangers and difficulties. It was well-nigh impossible that an emperor with his seat at Delhi could properly administer a distant province like Bengal or the Deccan or to check in time the centrifugal forces which were constantly at work in those rough days, the result of which was not slow in showing and within a few years after the accession of Muhammad Tughlak the Delhi empire began to crumble down by its own weight. The same thing was repeated during the reign of Aurangzeb when the Delhi empire again became too bulky and the same was true to all mediæval states whenever they had similarly outgrown in extent and territory.

Muhammad Tughlak, no doubt, made heroic attempts to patch up the fallen fabrics of the empire but "Delhi was distant" and while he quelled one rebellion in the Punjab another broke out at the same time in Bengal or the Deccan; in this manner, his attempts were met with only partial success, and before his death, he was convinced of the futility of his attempts to suppress the general spirit of revolt which then prevailed in his kingdom, as he himself said that it was a disease which admits of no cure. This revolting spirit soon spread from the north to the south, and the Amirs of the Deccan like those of Northern India shook off the yoke of

Delhi and established a new centre of Muslim civilization in the south. Thus was established the Bahmani Kingdom as the outcome of a revolutionary movement; this nature of its origin mainly determined the character of its future government.

It was essentially a military state and the military character of its administration was maintained from the begining to the end. The high officials of the state were all enrolled in the army list, and were given the command of a prescribed number of horsemen according to their respective rank and position; every one of them had to render military service to the state on which depended their rank and promotion. (A study of *Burhan-i-maasir* as well as *Ferishta* will reveal this fact).

At the head of the government was the king himself who was the pivot of the whole administrative system and the main-spring, upon which rested the entire political machinery. Like all other Muhammadan states it was a theocratic state with the king as the vicegerent on earth and thus he was the head of both church and state. The king was thus all-powerful in the state in matters whether spiritual or temporal. Although, in strict theory, he was responsible to the learned muslim theologians for his actions and doings and liable to explain to them his conduct, whenever necessary, yet in practice, he was responsible to nobody. And we find that no constitutional body as the parliament of our present day was devised as checks upon the absolute and irresponsible autocrat. No doubt there was a council in which was framed and discussed all important affairs of the state and which the king usually consulted before taking any important step in any direction but we must bear in mind that it was a nominated council and sat merely when the king summoned it and it had no right or power whatsoever to enforce its will upon the sovereign.

Next in importance to the king was the minister. His appointment and dismissal depended solely on the king; he was responsible to the king alone for his actions and so

long as the kings took an active part in the administration of the state his position was no better than a secretary to register his will and follow his dictation. It was only when the kings slept and passed their time in drinking and merry-making that the ministers stepped into their places and used to guide and control the affairs of the state.

Other important officers of the state were Sahib-i-Arz (one who reviews the army), Dabir (secretary), Dewans, Dawat-Dar (Keeper of Seals), Sayad-ul-Hujjab (Lord Chamberlain), Shahna-i-Phil (Keeper of Elephants), Kur Beg-i-Maisarah (Commander of the left wing), Kur Beg-i- Maimarah (Commander of the right wing), Naib Barbak and the Prefect of Police (*Burhan-i-maasir*, also Iswariprasad's *Mediæval India*).

The Court

The court consisted of the nobles, the muslim theologians, scholars and the musicians. Like all other mediæval states the Bahmani sovereigns spent large sums of money on its splendour. The splendour of the court of Muhammad Shah I is thus described by the Ferishta—"He sat on a throne called the Tukht-i-Feroja, the frame of which was of ebony, covered with plates of pure gold, inlaid with precious stones of great value……on the canopy over his seat he caused a golden ball, inlaid with jewels, to be placed, on which was a bird of paradise composed of precious stones, on whose head was a ruby of inestimable price……He increased the train of his attendants and divided the nobility and officers into four orders, allotting to each specific duties and times for attendance at court. He formed a corps which he styled Barders, whose duties consisted in mustering their troops, and in conducting persons to the audience. He had also a band of Siléhdars, composed of two hundred youths, selected from among the sons of the nobility to carry the royal armour and weapon ; and he formed a body-guard of four thousand men under the command of a nobleman of high rank

styled Meer Nobut. Fifty Siléhdars, and a thousand of the body-guard, attended at the palace daily" (Briggs' *Ferishta*, II, pp. 298-9; *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, printed original, I, pp. 535-6).

Provincial Administration

Allauddin Hassan divided his kingdom into tour provinces each of which was placed in charge of a governor who were later on styled as "Tarrufdar" (*Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, printed original, vol. I). The first province extended from Kulburga on the east to Debal on the west and Raichore and Mudkol on the south; the territory "comprehending Chaul on the sea-coast and lying between Junnar, Doulatabad, Beer and Pertum" formed the second province, Bidar, Indore, Kowlas and the districts in Telingana comprised the third province and Mahur, Rangir and a portion of Berar formed the fourth province. Among these governorships, that of Daulatabad was considered as the most important and the ambition of every great noble had been to seize this part. All these governors enjoyed almost unlimited power within their jurisdictions and each province was, what we may call a "miniature replica of the state." They were in sole charge of the forts within their jurisdictions and the appointment, promotion and dismissal of the commandant and garrison of these forts depended on them alone (*Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, printed original, vol. I, pp. 532-33).

The result was what might be expected, and the governors very often looked after their opportunity to assert themselves. The extreme vigilance of the kings like Alauddin Hassan and Muhammad Shah I, no doubt, kept in check their arrogant spirit but it is certain that during the reign of most of the other soverigns who cared little for the administration of the kingdom and passed the greater part of their time in the harem or in the wine-cups they enjoyed uncontrolled power in the provinces. Such state of things continued till the reign of Muhammad Shah III when his great

minister Mahmud Gawan devised some checks upon the power of the provincial governors. He made a fresh territorial distribution, dividing the kingdom into eight provinces, instead of four, as before, thus limiting the jurisdiction of each governor and with it their power also. Next, he still more curtailed their power by limiting their authority to one fort only within their jurisdiction and transferring the control of other forts to officers directly appointed by and responsible to the sovereign (Briggs' *Ferishta*, vol. II, pp. 502-5 ; printed original, vol. I, pp. 691-92).

These salutary reforms of Mahmud Gawan checked the growing insolence of the Taraufdars for a time and the system worked well under his able guidance and vigilant care. But after his death when the administration grew slack, and the old quarrels of the Deccanies and the foreigners revived, the Tarafdars again raised their heads and finally brought about the dismemberment of the mighty kingdom.

The Judiciary:

In the mediæval age nowhere do we find a regular gradation of courts from the highest to the lowest or any regular judicial procedure. Almost everywhere justice was dispensed with in a rough and ready fashion according to the discretion of the authorities and no written judgment was passed. Punishments were very severe and death-sentence was passed even for a petty offence. Bahmani kingdom too was no exception to this general rule and here also we find the absence of a regular judicial procedure and a regular gradation of courts. Neither was their the penal code in any way modified. Theft, robbery and treason were generally met with death-sentence. Parading through the streets of the cities was sometimes devised as a means of insult and punishment for some heinous crimes. Duelling as a means of settling disputes was practised in the Deccan a little later.

The king was the fountain-head of justice and he used to try cases and redress grievances. Muhammad Shah I

even made a tour annually, "through one quarter of his kingdom when he was employed in investigating the state of the resources, in redressing complaints," etc. (Brigg's *Ferishta* vol. II, p. 326 ; *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, vol I, printed original, p. 562). But such things were rarely done and we may rest assured that very few cases were actually tried by the kings. In the provinces the governors were certainly empowered with judicial functions but their multifarious duties afforded them little opportunity to devote their time in this direction and consequently most of the cases were, as elsewhere, decided by the village-moots or panchayets, so as regards justice the villagers derived little benefit from the government and they were mostly left to their own fate. Such state of things prevailed not only in the Bahmani kingdom but throughout the whole of India in the mediæval period. In *Burhan-i-maasir* as well as in *Tarikh-i-Ferishta* we get occasional references of Quaazis dispensing justice, but we do not know how they were appointed or what was their territorial limit. It seems that only the large towns or the provincial head-quarters had such Quaazis.

Fiscal System

Land revenue formed the principal source of income of the Bahmani kings. No evidence is still forthcoming as to the exact share taken by the Bahmani sovereigns from the produce of the soil; but from the materials that are available, one point is clear, that no oppressive exaction was made by the state from the peasantry. On the contray, we find that the sovereigns like Allauddin Hassan, Muhammad Shah I, Mahmud Shah III, and the minister Gawan took special care of the peasantry and encouraged cultivation (see *Burhan-i-maasir* and *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*). By the revenue reforms of Gawan, the cultivators were allowed to pay the revenue either in cash or in kind and under his patronage and vigilant care, the cultivators enjoyed peace, prosperity and happiness which is testified by the accounts of the Russian traveller Athnasius

Nikitin who came to Bidar in 1470 A. D. He said, "the country was populous, the lands well-cultivated, the roads safe from robbers, and the capital of the kingdom a magnificent city, with parks and promenades" (*India in the 15th century*, Hackluyt Society's publication).

The army

Now let us turn our attention to the military administration of the Bahmani kingdom. The army consisted of heterogenous elements, such as the Turks, Persians, Abyssinians, Rajputs, etc. (*Tarikh-i-Ferishta*). This heterogenous nature of the army was a source of weakness to the Bahmani kingdom and the animosity between the Deccanies and the Foreigners, moreover, told heavily on the efficiency of the army organization. As the Bahmani sovereigns were in constant warfare with their Hindu neighbours, large standing army was a necessity to them. From the account of Athnasius Nikitin we learn that the army of Muhammad Shah III numbered about 300,000 men, and including retainers and camp followers the number came up to 900,000 foot, 190,000 horse, and 575 elephants. The organization was as follows :—"All the higher officials of the kingdom were graded as Mansabdars, from Mansabdars of 2,000 to Mansabdars of 100 and we find that there were four divisions among these Mansabdars. The first division comprised the Mansabdars of 2,000 which were restricted to the Tarafdars of the four provinces. The second division comprised the Mansabdars of 1500, who received the lofty title of Amir-ul-Umra ; and the third division consisted of the Mansabdars of 1200. All the Mansabdars between 1000 and 100 were placed in the fourth division and they were designated as Mansabdaran Amiran (*Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, vol. I, printed original, p. 616). An Amir of a thousand had the privilege of carrying the Togha, the *alum*, (a banner) and drums as insignia of his order." (Briggs' *Ferishta*, vol. II, pp. 399). The Bahmani kings encouraged the jagir system and we find that large tracts of land were given to the nobles for their

Maintenance. Innumerable examples of this may be found both in the *Burhan-i-maasir* and *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*. An officer of 500 men got one lac of huns a year (a hun is approximately equal to Rs. 3-8 as.), the officers of a thousand two lacs, etc. But afterwards as a result of Gawan's reforms the salary of the mansabdars was still more increased and an officer of 500 used to get one lac and twenty five thousand huns, and of a thousand two lacs and fifty thousand (Brigg's *Ferishta*, vol. II, pp. 503-4). His reforms were so thorough that if the revenues of a jagirdar "fell short of the estimate even by one hun, the balance was payable out of the royal treasury and at the same time if the officers kept one soldier less than the complement, a sum equal to his pay was deducted from the allowances." (Briggs' *Ferishta*, vol. II, pp. 504-5). Thus unlike the Mughals, the Bahmanis enforced the full number of army.

Such was the administrative machinery of the Bahmani kingdom, and so far as its frame-work was concerned we cannot say that it was in any way worse than that of any other state in mediæval India, but whatever defect there was in it, it lay in the execution. Although we may blame the Bahmani sovereigns for introducing the jagir system as it enhanced the power of the aristrocracy and tended to local autonomy, yet if we carefully go through the pages of the histories of mediæval states, whether in Asia or Europe, we find that it was a common mode of paying the servants of the state in the East and the West alike. Under the strong rule of Alauddin Hassan, Muhammad Shah I and Ahmad Shah and under the able ministry of Mahmud Gawan, the administration of the kingdom was quite efficient; and peace, prosperity and happiness prevailed almost everywhere. But during the greater part of its existence, the efficiency of administration was greatly impaired by the lethargy and negligence of the sovereigns, who passed most of their time with the wine-cup in merry-making, and in quarrels and intrigues between the Deccani Muhammadans and the foreigners.

JOGINDRA NATH CHOWDHURY